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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 000299

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR
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SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR
INR/IAA (BEN-YEHUDA)
WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [HA](#)

SUBJECT: LATORTUE'S PLAN FOR HAITI'S FUTURE, THOUGHTS ON
PREVAL AND ARISTIDE

REF: PAP 284

11. SUMMARY. In a 6 February meeting with DAS Duddy, four Congressional staff and Charge, Interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue laid out his views on the continuing challenges in Haiti as well as the keys to breaking the cycle of failure. His frank yet optimistic assessment echoed similar messages delivered during the first months of his tenure in 2004, before insecurity and electoral concerns pushed much of his agenda to the side. Latortue identified four key priorities for the new government: infrastructure, electricity, education, and financial and banking reform. He also spoke of several key potential pitfalls, including narcotrafficking; the influence of partisanship in both American and international politics; and the role of Aristide in Haiti's future. Latortue remains convinced that insecurity in Haiti is a byproduct of misery and intolerable living conditions, one which can be eliminated by improving the entire country rather than pacifying slum neighborhoods. Latortue did not believe Preval would run back into the arms of Aristide, noting that many of Preval's key aides are not Aristide supporters. Reftel addressed specific comments by Latortue on February 6 on the elections process and transition period. END SUMMARY.

12. Interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue met on 6 February with Charge; Deputy Assistant Secretary Patrick Duddy; Carl Meacham, Senior Republican Staff to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Ted Brennan, Senior Republican Staff to the House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere; Paul Oostburg-Sanz, Democratic Chief of Counsel to the House Committee on International Relations; and Caroline Tess, Foreign Policy Advisor to Senator Bill Nelson.

13. Oostburg-Sanz asked Latortue what he thought are the next key steps for Haiti, both during the transition and beyond, in order to definitively break the cycle of failed governments. Tess asked what the key priorities would be for the new government. Latortue, who often praises the economic potential of the Haitian people, spoke at length, but began by laying out four immediate priorities that he views as critical to ending the systemic problems of poverty and misery in Haiti.

Roads and Bridges

¶4. According to Latortue, two ongoing road projects will do a great deal to open up the countryside for agricultural production. The first, from Port-au-Prince to Mirebalais, would improve access to the fertile Artibonite river valley and central plateau. The existing road, little more than a cart path in places, makes a voyage of maybe 30 miles take several hours. Fruits and vegetables cannot be transported over this road because they are spoiled from the jostling. Latortue claimed that he also had secured international support to extend the road from Mirebalais to the regional capitol of Hinche and from Hinche all the way to Cap Haitien on the northern coast. If true, such a road could reduce the travel time from Port-au-Prince to Cap Haitien by half and potentially allow for decentralized development of tourism and agriculture outside Port-au-Prince.

¶5. The second road, extending from Cap Haitien east to Ouanaminthe on the Dominican border would also improve Dominican access to Haitian agricultural products, as well as open up the possibility for increased tourism and light industrial development in the country's northern department. Latortue was very pleased with these projects, and he said he was happy that they will provide an immediate boost for the new government.

¶6. Latortue also highlighted additional projects, citing the need to build a modern road extending from Gonaives to Port-de-Paix on the northwest coast and a road linking the regional capitals of Cayes and Jeremie on the southern coast. He said that people had been talking about these roads since before he was born and that it was finally time to do it. Both Port-de-Paix and Jeremie are remote and accessible

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primarily by sea and air; as such, they are also the areas with the least environmental degradation, the best quality and variety of tree crops, and the most beautiful beaches. Modern roads would open up these areas to tourism and agricultural development. Lastly, Latortue stated his appreciation for bridge projects funded by USAID along the Gonaives - Port-de-Paix corridor, and he stated that small scale bridge projects remained a key priority to give rural Haitians access to both markets and education.

Electricity

¶7. Haiti's current electricity capacity is 150 megawatts. Latortue does not feel that it is necessary to dramatically increase capacity, but he believed that Haiti needed to develop a master plan to increase efficiency, as actual electricity production is but a fraction of capacity. A master plan would take into account the potential for wind power along the northwest coast, which borders the Windward Passage, and solar power, an obvious choice in a country that sees at least 300 days of sunlight a year. Additionally, Latortue was optimistic about the potential for small hydroelectric operations that might provide power only for neighboring communes but would be less susceptible to the damage and silt obstruction that have plagued the country's main hydroelectric dam in Peligre. Latortue said, "Big hydro is finished, but we could definitely use small hydro in Haiti."

Education

¶8. Latortue underlined that the country needed plumbers, electricians, carpenters and engineers. Future Haitian governments should focus on improving basic public education to allow for more democratic participation while also making large improvements to trade and professional education in order to create work

Banking Reform

¶9. According to Latortue, a significant middle class will

not be possible in Haiti until average citizens have access to credit, mortgages and investment. The established banking system is tilted disproportionately toward supporting Port-au-Prince's elite and business clientele. Only one major U.S. bank, Citibank, has an office in Haiti, and it does not offer personal banking. Standard policy of Haitian banks does not permit provincial branches to issue loans without the approval of the central office in Port-au-Prince, which is typically skeptical of any loan in the provinces. (NOTE: Emboffs hear this complaint from business owners in every regional capital as an example of the harmful preeminence of the "Republic of Port-au-Prince." END NOTE.) Latortue stated that the will and capacity of the Haitian people never ceases to amaze him when they have access to resources.

Putting the Horse before the Cart

110. Meacham asked Latortue how any of this could realistically happen without security. Latortue replied that security was a byproduct of misery, not the cause. He stated that the vast majority of persons living in slums and popular areas of Port-au-Prince are Haitians who have migrated to the capital due to lack of opportunity in the provinces under Duvalier and Aristide. By providing good vehicular access, reliable electricity, and access to credit in the provinces, Latortue believed that many of these people would choose to return to the countryside rather than continue in squalor in Port-au-Prince. He stated that the violent actors and gang members are not born criminals and only worked in crime and drugs as a means of feeding themselves. Latortue was adamant that most of these persons would choose legitimacy if given the option. Furthermore, Latortue stated that there is no hope of addressing insecurity in the popular areas of Port-au-Prince until these Haitians could be put to work, either in agriculture, tourism or light manufacturing. Without a concerted effort to employ and provide social

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services to persons in these areas, the gangs and drug dealers would remain the best option for residents.

111. On narcotics trafficking, Latortue stated that the Haitian government is currently and will remain effectively powerless to combat well-heeled drug trafficking interests in Haiti. He said that the best policy for the Haitian government would be to expand engagement with U.S. law enforcement officials and cooperate fully with DEA operations and investigations.

Preval and Aristide

112. Meacham then asked whether Aristide would be welcome to return under a Preval presidency. Latortue stated that he could not speak for Preval, but that he did not believe this would happen. He stated that many of Preval's closest supporters had broken permanently with Aristide, who Latortue called a "man of the past." However, he noted that a preemptive or premature rejection of Preval by the United States would be the quickest way to drive him into the arms of Aristide. He urged the staffers to take the message back to Washington that the United States must embrace the electoral victor in a bipartisan way, even if the victor is not necessarily palatable to one party or the other. Latortue also cautioned that the United States must not give any credence to Haitian actors who come out against Preval from the outset. These actors, he said, would be acting purely out of self-interest. (COMMENT: Latortue has shown no inclination toward Preval during his tenure as Prime Minister, and we take his concern as genuine. END COMMENT.)

113. Oostburg-Sanz asked if the message from U.S. and international channels on Aristide being a man of the past is being heard in Haiti, both among the poor and the elite. Latortue believed that it was, but he noted the need to continue hammering on this message, saying "We must repeat,

repeat, repeat this message."

Democracy Building and Bipartisanship

¶14. When asked about the prospect of continuing democratic progress in Haiti, Latortue stated that he viewed the role of NDI and IRI as essential. He stated his belief that these groups should work together to empower a political opposition in conjunction with the government. He also said that Caricom and the OAS should have an important role to play in this, especially in their capacity to foster excursions and exchanges among Caribbean legislators and government officials. Latortue felt that it is essential for Haitian politicians to see democracy in action throughout the Caribbean, particularly in Jamaica.

¶15. Finally, Latortue offered his opinion on the recent New York Times article alleging the existence of two distinct U.S. foreign policy agendas in Haiti. He stated that this is an internal issue between the parties in the U.S. and that it is time for the U.S. to treat Haiti with bipartisan consensus.
CARNEY